

## **Educational Opportunities of Social Networks: Concept and Types of Social Networks**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the educational opportunities of social networks in the context of foreign language education, focusing on the concept of foreign language information competence (FLIC) and its integration with communicative competence. The study discusses the types of social networks, their popularity among students and teachers, and the potential benefits of using social networks for teaching reading, writing, and other speech activities. The findings highlight the readiness of students and teachers to incorporate social networks into language learning, emphasizing their role in individualizing the learning process, increasing motivation, and reducing barriers to communication in a foreign language.

**Keywords:** Social networks, foreign language education, foreign language information competence (FLIC), blended learning, communicative competence, information competence, educational technology.

Higher school teachers are faced with the task of preparing a specialist who knows the methods and techniques of working with information and is able to “rationally use information and information technologies to maintain and develop their intellectual and creative potential<sup>1</sup>”. In relation to teaching a foreign language, this task means the importance of the formation and development of students’ information competence together with their foreign language communicative competence. Today researchers<sup>2</sup> talk about the synthesis of these two competencies in the methodology of teaching a foreign language, which leads to the emergence of foreign language information competence (FLIC) (term by L.K. Raitskaya). This competence consists in the student’s possession of abilities, knowledge, skills and actions that allow the student to navigate the information environment and work with foreign language information, both in traditional media and on the Internet. Among the conditions for the formation of foreign language information competence are:

1. High level of development of foreign language communicative competence (not lower than level B2 according to the Common European Classification).
2. Systematic development of skills and abilities:
  - a) knowledge of the existence of various types of information and information resources in a foreign language;
  - b) the ability to navigate information in a foreign language presented on the Internet;
  - c) the ability to search and select relevant information in a foreign language presented on the Internet;
  - d) the ability to present information in writing in a foreign language in accordance with the

<sup>1</sup> Малинина И. А. Применение технологий смешанного обучения иностранному языку в высшей школе [Электронный ресурс] // Современные научные исследования и инновации. 2013. № 10. URL: <http://web.snauka.ru/issues/2013/10/27936> (дата обращения: 03.01.2018).

<sup>2</sup> Раицкая Л. К. Сущность и формирование иноязычной информационной компетенции в высшей школе // Вестник Московского университета. Серия 20. Педагогическое образование. 2010. № 2. С. 28-35.

communicative situation;

e) knowledge of the features of various styles of writing in a foreign language;

f) the ability to work with online libraries, electronic catalogs and other similar resources in a foreign language. In the modern world, a person is under the influence of a very intense flow of information, including in a foreign language. People receive a significant part of information through information and communication technologies, which permeate all spheres of human activity. A person's ability to navigate information flows both in his native and foreign languages determines his success and competitiveness as a specialist<sup>3</sup>.

All this determines the formation of foreign language information competence as the goal of foreign language education and predetermines the search for ways of its effective formation and development. One of the means of developing this competence in the practice of teaching foreign languages is social networks used within the framework of blended learning technology. Social networks are not educational resources, but were created for the purpose of communication. The very name "social network" was introduced by D. Barnes in 1954; initially the scope of application of this term was sociology<sup>4</sup>. Later, this concept begins to be used in other industries. Researchers<sup>5</sup> consider guest books, forums, and blogs to be prototypes of social networks. Currently, social networks are defined in different ways; we will rely on the definition of V. M. Sazanov: a scientist understands social networks as a means of mass communication and knowledge transfer.

There are a large number of social networks, which E. D. Patarakin combines into two groups based on the criteria for accessing them: - public social networks, for which the professional, age and gender characteristics of the participants are not important. Examples of such networks include: FaceBook, MySpace, VKontakte, MoyKrug and many others; – special networks that are created for participants united according to a certain characteristic. As a rule, people become participants in such social networks by invitation (i.e. they are closed)<sup>6</sup>. Noteworthy is the fact that among teachers there is no unambiguous attitude towards the use of social networks in teaching practice. O. A. Klimenko notes that the social network Facebook has long been recognized as one of the most popular tools for training and development and allows university teachers to create courses for students<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, the attitude of scientists can be characterized as wary: according to their opinion, the use of social networks in teaching requires careful preparation on the part of the teacher, as well as a well-founded and developed methodology for working with social networks in the learning process<sup>8</sup>. When modeling the process of teaching a foreign language using publicly available social networks, it is necessary to evaluate the ease of use of them from a technical point of view and the usefulness of using social networks from a learning point of view<sup>9</sup>.

Moving directly to our research, we note that this work presents part of the results of a survey of students and teachers of a foreign language at the university. The survey was conducted before students began working with social networks as part of blended learning. The presented part of the survey consisted of both open and closed questions and was aimed at identifying the subjective experience of students and teachers regarding the use of social networks, the opinions of students

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<sup>3</sup> Аксенова И. Н. Самостоятельная работа в сети Интернет при изучении иностранного языка бакалаврами журналистами на курсе «Иностранный язык для специальных целей» // Современное языковое образование: инновации, проблемы, решения: сборник научных трудов. М.: Московский государственный гуманитарный университет им. М. А. Шолохова, 2015. Вып. 2. С. 53-55.

<sup>4</sup> Сазанов В. М. Социальные сети – публичная сфера: в 2-х т. М.: Лаборатория СВМ, 2012. Т. 1. 220 с.

<sup>5</sup> Кечинов М. Что такое социальные сети. История создания социальных сетей [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://mkechinov.ru/article.social.html> (дата обращения: 12.02.2018).

<sup>6</sup> Патаракин Е. Д. Социальные взаимодействия и сетевое обучение 2.0. М.: НП «Современные технологии в образовании и культуре», 2009. 176 с.

<sup>7</sup> Клименко О. А. Социальные сети как средство обучения и взаимодействия участников образовательного процесса // Теория и практика образования в современном мире: материалы Международной заочной научной конференции. СПб.: Реном, 2012. С. 405-407.

<sup>8</sup> Chin-His L., Warschauer M., Blake R. Language learning through social networks: perceptions and reality // *Language Learning & Technology*. 2016. Vol. 20. № 1. P. 124-143.

<sup>9</sup> Stevenson M. P., Liu M. Learning a Language with Web 2.0: Exploring the Use of Social Networking Features of Foreign Language Learning Websites [Электронный ресурс] // *Calico Journal*. 2010. Vol. 27. № 2. URL: <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/CALICO/article/view/23033> (дата обращения: 12.12.2017).

and teachers and their expectations from the integration of social networks into teaching practice. Initially, we present the results of a survey of 2-4 year students of full-time, part-time and part-time departments studying in the direction of “Pedagogical Education”, profile “Foreign Language” (foreign language proficiency level B1-C1). The purpose of the first question was to identify the most used social networks among students. The survey results showed that all students have pages on several social networks; The leader is the social network VKontakte, this network is used by all the students surveyed, second place according to the survey is taken by Instagram and third by Facebook, followed by Twitter.

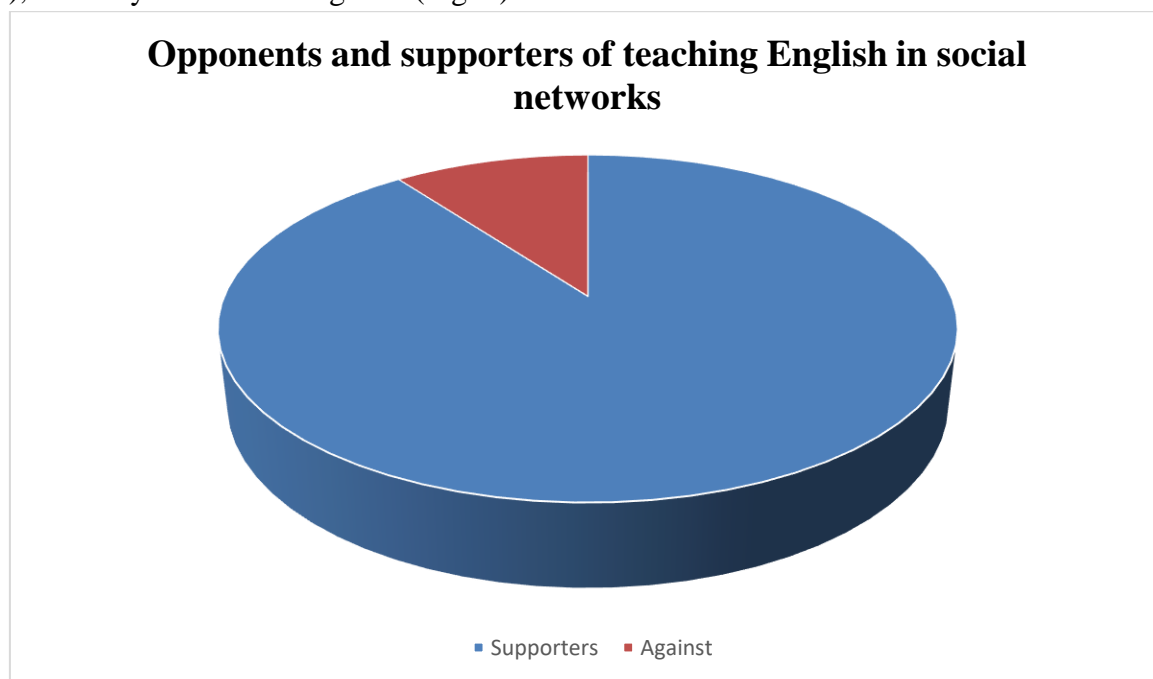
When asked about the purposes of using social networks, students noted:

- 50% – communication with friends;
- 30% – for entertainment;
- 16% – for training;
- 4% – other possibilities for using social networks.

Regarding the time spent on social networks, the answers were distributed as follows:

- 30% of students check their pages on social networks from time to time;
- 32% spend less than an hour a day on social networks;
- 20% – more than an hour a day;
- 18% of respondents spend all day on social networks.

The results obtained on these issues indicate the high popularity of social networks among students and at the same time demonstrate a lack of understanding of their educational potential among students. Which, in turn, confirms the opinion of researchers<sup>10</sup> that modern students, although they are “digital natives,” often have no idea how to use ICT for learning. When asked about the possibility of using social networks in teaching a foreign language, the overwhelming majority of students who took part in the survey were in favor (89.8%), and only 10.2% were against (Fig. 1).



The results obtained show the readiness and desire of students to include social networks in their teaching practice. When analyzing student responses about the effectiveness of using social networks for the development of types of speech activity, we found that:

- 35% of students surveyed note the greatest effectiveness of using social networks for

<sup>10</sup> Crystal D. Texts and Tweets: Myths and Realities [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Voj8VYZDAy8> (дата обращения: 24.12.2017).

reading development;

- 32% – letters;
- 18% – speaking;
- 15% – listening. All students noted several answer options in this question

Thus, the study conducted among students indicates the popularity of social networks. As a result of the survey, it was found that the majority of students support the integration of social networks in teaching a foreign language and see the greatest effectiveness of their use for teaching reading and writing. The next step was a survey of teachers. The majority of teachers surveyed use social networks (84.4%), 15.6% do not use social networks. Among the most popular social networks among teachers, Telegram is in first place (62%), Facebook is in second place (27%), then Instagram (7%). 4% of teachers indicated that they use other social networks. Regarding the time spent on social networks, the following data was obtained: – 40% of surveyed teachers spend less than an hour a day checking their pages on social networks; – 50% check their pages on social networks from time to time; – 6.8% spend more than an hour a day on social networks; – 3.2% do not use social networks. Most teachers use social networks for recreation (43.8%); to communicate with students (34.4%); for training (18.6%); the answer “other” was noted by 3.2% (in the comments to the question it was indicated that in this case social networks are used to communicate with colleagues). 93.6% of teachers participating in the survey expressed support for the use of social networks in the practice of teaching a foreign language. 6.4% were against their use.

Noting for which types of speech activity the use of social networks is most effective, teachers emphasized the greatest effectiveness of their use:

- to develop writing skills (37%);
- reading (35%);
- listening and speaking received 14% each.

It is worth noting that when answering this question, teachers emphasized several answers, ranking them according to the degree of probability (which of the listed types of speech activity, in their opinion, will develop more effectively when using social networks, and for the development of which types of speech activity the degree of effectiveness there is less use of social networks). The promotion of writing and reading to the first positions in terms of the effectiveness of development in social networks is due to the fact that in social networks communication is mainly of a written nature, making them a convenient means of developing the skills of these particular types of speech activity. Based on the comments given by teachers, we can conclude that social networks provide a good platform, which, along with opportunities for developing communicative competence, provides opportunities for solving a number of educational problems:

1. Manage the learning process. Social networks are an effective tool to help teachers and students stay in touch; information about cancellations, rescheduling of classes, conferences, etc. can be published in a group on social networks.

2. Individualize the learning process. Social media allows students to complete assignments anywhere, anytime. Social networks provide teachers with the opportunity to find out the interests and hobbies of students and take them into account when planning the educational process.

3. Organize the learning process. In a group on social networks, you can continue the discussion that began in class and publish assignments for students.

4. Involve students who are inactive or less active in class in discussions.

5. Increase motivation to learn a foreign language. Social networks can be used as a platform for preparing and conducting projects, organizing quizzes and competitions, and conducting surveys. In general, summing up the results of the survey of students and teachers, we can conclude that the majority of students and teachers are registered on social networks, this helps to alleviate the difficulties in adapting and mastering a new interface that may arise when working with specialized

training programs. Which confirms the conclusions of G.V. Mozhaeva, A.V. Feshchenko that the use of social networks eliminates the difficulties associated with adaptation to a new communication space that may arise in the process of working with special training programs and platforms<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the conducted research, part of which is presented in this article, testifies to the effectiveness of the use of social networks in the practice of teaching foreign languages to students, since their use contributes to the implementation of the personal-activity approach, the principle of individuality, increasing motivation to learn a foreign language, as well as reducing stress due to fear of making a mistake.

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<sup>11</sup> Можаяева Г. В., Фещенко А. В. Использование виртуальных социальных сетей в обучении студентов-гуманитариев // Информационный бюллетень ассоциации «История и компьютер». 2010. № 36. С. 174-175.